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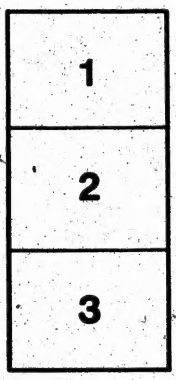

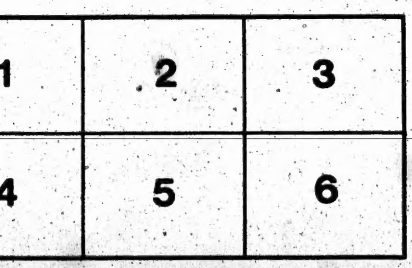

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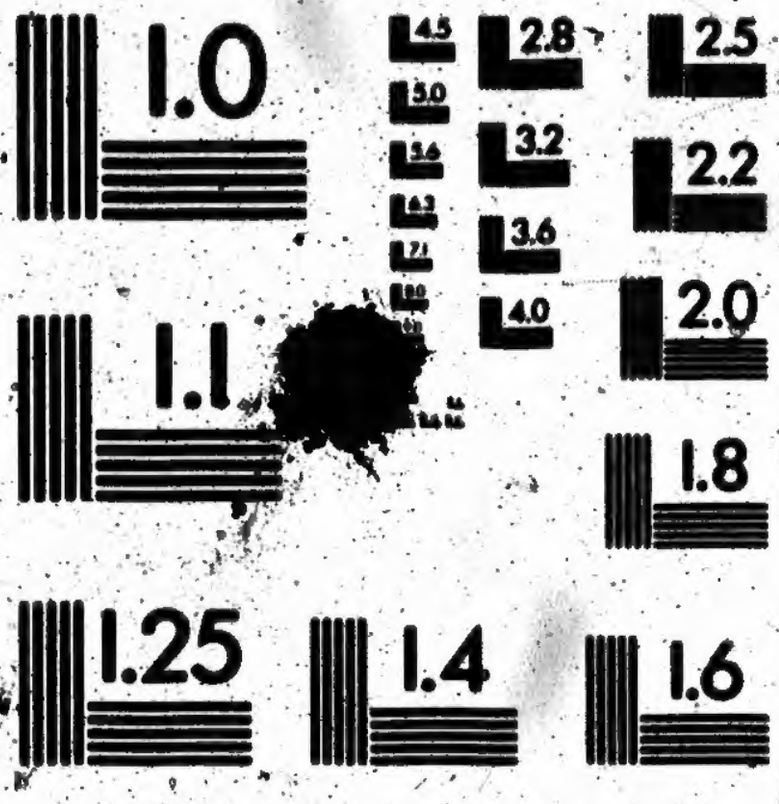

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SERMON

PREACHED AT THE VILLAGE

OF

WATERLOO, SHEFFORD, L. C.

ON

FRIDAY, 4th MAY,

1832.

A DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL FAST.

BY THE

REV. GEORGE SALMON,

Episcopal Missionary at Shefford.

MONTREAL:

PRINTED BY WORKMAN & BOWMAN.

1833.

Mem

PUBLIS

TO THE

Members of the Episcopal Church and other Friends

IN THE VILLAGE OF

WATERLOO AND ITS VICINITY,

THE FOLLOWING SERMON,

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST, IS RESPECFULLY INSCRIBED AS

A TOKEN OF MINISTERIAL REGARD,

BY THE AUTHOR.

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SERMON.

"Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: Yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hand. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not."—JONAH, iii. 7, 8, 9.

It is a maxim recorded by the most elegant and distinguished of the Roman poets, that "*It is lawful to allow oneself to be instructed by an enemy.*" And why, at a particular time, and in peculiar circumstances, may it not, by parity of reasoning, be equally lawful for Christians to gather instruction from the conduct and example of Heathens? It is unquestionably the intention of the divine Being that this should be the case: and it may be, that unless with a view to effect such purpose, the striking characteristics of the history of the text, had not been so fully recorded. From the conviction, then, that it is the duty of the people of God, to gather wisdom from the manifestation of the providences of God, be such providences exhibited where they may,—and from the persuasion that the relation of the text, reasonably accordant with the subject before us, furnishes that instructive lesson as well as, if not better than, any other portion of the Inspired Volume,—I have therefore selected it as the foundation of those remarks which, in subserviency to the intention of the Government in appointing this day of *fasting* and *humiliation*, it very properly becomes our duty to make.

So rarely have general fasts, appointed by authority, been observed in this Province, that to many of us, perhaps the *name* is almost as novel as the *occasion*: an evidence, I trust, (and I believe I am not wrong in drawing such conclusion,) of the goodness and mercy of God towards us, as a people; by which, notwithstanding the distractions which have convulsed almost every nation of Europe, we have been hitherto maintained in safety and in peace.

Time has been, however, when *fasting* and *humiliation*, both of them in themselves valuable aids to the increase of true piety, were at once more general and more frequent. And this justly forms one of many particulars in which there is reason to regret our so great departure from primitive practice. Many observances have been laid aside as antiquated, and inconsistent with the state of modern improvement, which have not been succeeded, however, by any thing better. And

much as the present generation may surpass, in spirituality of *appearance*, the generations which have more immediately preceded it, we strongly suspect if the heart were laid open, there would be found less of that true but unostentatious piety—less of that firm principle, that solid scriptural faith—and less of that deep practical devotion, which so eminently characterized and supported the early Reformers and Martyrs, under the trials and persecutions of that eventful period.

In times of sorrow and affliction, *fasting* has been more or less practised in all ages, and by all nations, of the world. It is indeed, in some sort, the natural consequence of grief; and it serves to show, among other things, how intimate the connexion is between the mind and the body, and how powerfully they are affected by mutual sympathy. Thus circumstanced, the mind, absorded in the one prevailing contemplation, turns an inattentive ear to the wants of the body, and even suspends for a time the usual cravings of hunger.

Anterior to the age of Moses, we find no mention made of *fasts*. It is highly probable, however, that *fasting* was practised by the Patriarchs; though from its reasonableness, or, it may be, from the very brief history we have of Patriarchal-times, such circumstance has not been expressly noticed.—But since the time of Moses, fasts have been not only of frequent recurrence, but they have also, in some sense, and on some occasions, been enjoined by God himself. And so long as the Jewish Church existed, *fasting* formed a very prominent, and, it may be, very valuable religious observance, by which the Jews were assisted in subjecting the body to the mind, and in preparing both for the better and more spiritual discharge of the offices of devotion.

From the Jews, it is highly probable that this practice was first introduced among the Gentile or Heathen nations. And here in the text we have proof how widely the practice had spread, and what firm footing it had obtained; since the king of Nineveh immediately orders recourse to be had to *it*, among other means, by which to strive to avert the impending judgments of Heaven.

Under the Gospel-dispensation no particular fasts are appointed by Divine authority. It does not appear that any such were instituted by Christ himself, nor yet by the Apostles at his command.* When, however, the Pharisees reproached Christ that his disciples did not fast so rigidly as their disciples did, his answer clearly implies that, though his disciples did not then fast, a time would arrive when they also should fast:

* In this instance, as well as in many others, our Saviour sanctioned the prevailing usage. His own instructions on this subject relate to the spirit in which the duty should be performed.

"When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast in those days." Accordingly, we find from the Scriptures how fully this prediction was realized by the Apostles and early Christians. Saint Paul, in particular, makes frequent mention of his *fasting*. And we learn from the history of the Church in the first century, that *fasting* was frequently had recourse to; and, indeed, was associated with her most sacred acts.

Thus then, though our Saviour enjoined no especial fast, fasts have always been observed in the Church; either privately, by an individual, or particular congregations,—or publicly and generally, by civil authority, when circumstances occur which it is conceived render such fast expedient.

The present is one of these cases. And with the view of assisting you in the proper observation of the *fast*, this day appointed, and thus further conforming to the laudable intention of Government, I shall

First, Lay before you the history of the text, from which we may derive a model for our own conduct.

Second, Call upon you, as being in some sense similarly circumstanced with the Ninevites, to the discharge of the like duty; and

Third, We shall offer some observations as to the *manner* and *spirit* in which that duty should be performed.

At the time the prophet Jonah received the particular instructions to which we are indebted for the book, that bears his name, Nineveh was the principal city of one of the earliest and perhaps proudest Kingdoms of the Earth: it was the Capital of the Kingdom of Assyria. It was also a very ancient city. Moses, in Gen. x. ii. expressly says, that Nineveh was founded by Asher, the son of Shem. And if so, Nineveh at the date of the text, had existed for more than twelve centuries. It was favourably situated on the bank of the river Tigris, which was annually conveying to this great *mart* the immense wealth and miscellaneous commerce of the East. At the time Jonah visited it, a population of six hundred thousand souls was supposed to have been comprehended within its gigantic walls; which, with the height of an hundred feet, surmounted by fifteen hundred towers, and so broad withal that three chariots could safely drive abreast upon them, traced a circuit of eighteen leagues round! Associate in your minds the power, splendour, and resources necessarily connected with this description, and you may form some idea of the then city of Nineveh.

But amid all this earthly grandeur there was one thing deficient: they were ignorant of the one true God. They might indeed, in later times, when the *Twelve Tribes* settled in the

promised land, have heard of the miraculous interposition of the Almighty, so frequently manifested in behalf of Israel; but as an influential principle, moulding their views, and affecting their conduct,—such knowledge of God, most probably was not in all their thoughts. Nineveh was in every respect a heathen city. Shall we be surprised then that iniquity exceedingly prevailed there? to such a degree, indeed, that, to use the emphatic language of Scripture, "their wickedness came up before God." Look abroad upon Christian cities and contemplate *there* the repulsive scenes of immorality and crime daily exhibited. Imagine, then, the influence,—the strong, powerful influence of Christianity over the public mind, to be removed, and we perhaps may form some idea of the guilt and sin of the ancient, splendid, but now devoted Nineveh.

Wicked, however, as Nineveh was, (and the history leads us naturally to suppose that it was pre-eminently so,) God did not proceed summarily to the execution of his purpose. The Prophet was sent to apprise its inhabitants of the intentions of Heaven with respect to them.

Thus commissioned, Jonah went, unattended, it would seem, into this immense Metropolis, a day's journey; proclaiming as he went,—"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

The sacred text here being so extremely brief, some scope must necessarily be given to the imagination. That this short denunciation should comprehend all Jonah's intercourse with the Ninevites, is not at all probable. This was unquestionably the form of words he publicly proclaimed in the streets: but that he also explained the matter to them more at large, and displayed to them their guilt and danger, we must believe; or how otherwise shall we interpret the conduct of the Ninevcites, without supposing them under a supernatural influence, which, for ourselves, we are as far from thinking, as we believe the Bible is from authorizing such thoughts? And that the inhabitants of such a city as Nineveh, would allow themselves to be wrought upon by an obscure foreigner passing through their streets, and crying—"Yet forty day's and Nineveh shall be overthrown,"—without giving some further and satisfactory account of the nature of his mission, and at whose instance he came,—is a presumption too absurd for any reasonable person to entertain. No doubt Jonah explained *all* to their satisfaction; and his being a Hebrew, of a nation under the known and distinguished protection of Heaven, most probably lent its influence to fasten on the public mind a conviction of the truth of the danger he predicted.

But what was the effect which the divine denunciation, so solemnly pronounced by the Prophet, produced? As it is

expressed in the Scripture, "the people of Nineveh believed God"; 'they were fully persuaded of the truth of what Jonah delivered to them from God.' Consequently, immediate notice was taken of the Prophet's message. They seized with avidity the interim allowed them between the annunciation of the danger and the time specified for its accomplishment, to appease by repentance the displeasure of the Most High, and turn away His justly excited wrath from them. Nor was this movement merely the effect of *panic*,—suddenly infused into the public mind, and therefore confined, as such affections generally are, to the weak and credulous part of the community;—not at all. It was the result of sober deliberate conviction: and it emanated from those whose exalted situations gave them advantages not very favourable to the production of ideal terror, or the idle fears of superstition.

No sooner was the king apprised of the ominous message of this extraordinary herald, than, laying aside the *insignia* of royalty, he hastened to comply with those instructions himself which he was about to issue for the guidance of his magnificent and extensive capital. Agreeably to the practice of the East, he girded himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes: and he caused it to be published through Nineveh, by his decree and that of his nobles, saying, "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn from their evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

The result was, their conduct was pleasing to God.—Not only did their *fasting* and *humiliation* arrest his attention, but it is expressly mentioned that God saw their works, that they *turned from their evil way*." Convinced that they were true penitents, he lent a willing ear to their petitions; mercy succeeded to *justice*, and the execution of the threatning was suspended.

Having thus laid before you the history of the text, we come

II. *To call upon you, as being in some sense similarly circumstanced with the Ninevites, to the discharge of the like duty.*

That we, as well as the inhabitants of Nineveh, have rendered ourselves, as a people, obnoxious to the displeasure of God, by wicked works, the retrospect of our lives, and the records of our consciences will, no doubt, abundantly testify. We do not suppose, however, that our sins, great and aggravated as they are, will be visited with any *unnatural*, divin-

judgment, such as the Ninevites were unquestionably threatened with. Still, that God can, that God will, and that God does punish the wicked, whether that character apply to a nation or to an individual, is established by many express declarations in the inspired volume. Under the present dispensation, God, as the supreme Governor of the Universe, ordinarily makes use of natural or human means to

"Work his Sovereign will;"

the effects of which may be attributed to what are usually termed *second causes*. But that these, in the hand of God, are as efficient to subserve his purpose, although to us, indeed, not so striking and awful, the history of the world affords undeniable proofs.

Notwithstanding then, God may not interpose in a miraculous manner to punish the wickedness of mankind,—albeit, we hear not the expressly appointed divine herald going through our land proclaiming, "Yet forty days," and "Your habitations shall be made desolate;" still, when we see secondary causes assuming, by the permission of providence, the alarming appearance of a divine visitation,—when we see strange, frightful, and, hitherto, almost unknown diseases

——"Waiting round,
To hurry mortals home;"

when, in short, to use the language of the Prophet Isaiah,—when "the judgments of the Lord are perceived in the earth, it is the duty of the inhabitants thereof to learn righteousness."

We observed that between the situation of the Ninevites and our own, there is some affinity: the Ninevites were exposed to impending danger, and so, we conceive, are we; and beyond this it is not our intention, nor indeed is it necessary, to press the resemblance.

Most of you, my brethren, have doubtless been informed, through the medium of the public prints, of the frightful ravages which that dreadful disease the *Cholera*, has made on the Continent of Eurpoe, and now, more recently, is making, though under more mitigating circumstances, in our parent Country, the island of Great Britain. To lay before you any thing like a full and correct statement of its alarming progress and malignity, would not comport with the compass of a single discourse, nor indeed, with the present occasion. It may suffice to say that, up to the last foreign dates, it has been gradually extending itself; and so great has been its mortality that, upon an average, considerably more than one-third of the number of persons attacked by it, have fallen victims to the disease. Whether the disorder be contagious or no, is a

question which, it would seem, has not yet been satisfactorily determined by the members of the medical profession. One thing, however, is, we think, apparent—that the disease was introduced into Europe from Asia, and from the Continent into England. In some sense, then, at least, it is communicable.

Now none of you can be ignorant of the very close and intimate commercial connexion which subsists between these Provinces, the United States, and England. A very few weeks more and the ice, which has now for so many months rendered our shores inaccessible, to foreign shipping, will be dispersed; and our ports will be again thrown open for the purposes of a valuable and necessary commerce. There is every prospect too, that the Emigration to this Country will be as extensive, and much more general this year than it was last year. We look forward, then, with just apprehension * to the opening of the navigation, that being the most probable channel through which the Cholera may be introduced into this country. And no one who has perused the distressing accounts, which have been communicated to us, from time to time, of its direful effects abroad, in other climates, can contemplate otherwise than with fear the realization of similar scenes among ourselves.

The Government, with a becoming prudence, and laudable regard for the public safety, have adopted such measures as seemed meet to them, by which (so far as it depends on human means,) to avert the danger, and prevent the disease from communicating its fatal contagion to our own shores. But while we unhesitatingly admit, that it is both proper, and meritorious for National Governments to have recourse to such precautionary measures, we must also bear in mind, that in few instances where diseases are of so violent a nature, have such measures been wholly successful. The attempt every nation owes to its own safety. But the *success* of that attempt depends upon the concurrence and co-operation of the Almighty God.—What is impossible with man, it quite feasible with Him. And diseases, no less than persons, are under His direction, and are subject to His controul. His *fiat* can circumscribe their ravages, and arrest their course. He can say to them, as to the agitated deep—"Thus far shalt thou go; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

Among that people, around whom the Almighty casts the sheltering *aegis* of His grace, the elements of disease will be tempered with an indulgent hand. He who "forgives the iniquities of His people, and healeth all their diseases," will also deliver them from the "pestilence that walketh in darkness, and from the *destruction that wasteth at noon-day*. And He

* How awfully has this apprehension been realized!

who at the repentance of Nineveh, turned from them the impending storm, is still accessible to the petition of the needy and importunate sinner: His ear has not become heavy that it cannot hear, neither is His arm shortened that it cannot save." As was the case with the Ninevites, so, in a measure, is it with us; the danger, we trust, is yet some way off: but there is just cause for alarm: and it is our wisdom to improve the interim, be that long or short.

The Executive of our Country, like the prince and nobles of Nineveh, far from trusting to an arm of flesh, now call publicly upon every dutiful and loyal subject of this Province to propitiate, by a season of *fasting* and *humiliation*, the favour of that Almighty Being, whose kingdom ruleth over all, and without whose assistance vain is the help of man.

While then, as in duty bound, we hasten to obey this reasonable and authoritative call, it cannot be thought unimportant that we consider

III. *The manner and spirit in which that call should be obeyed.*

In the text we are informed of the way in which the people of Nineveh observed their *fast:* and as their conduct, in this respect, was acceptable to Almighty God, and subserved the important purpose for which it was entered upon, if in the present instance, we do not servilely follow, we may at least gather much practical instruction from their example.

First,—*Then, it is evident they strictly observed the fast.*

On the day appointed for that solemnity, neither man nor beast was to taste anything. Not only were they to abridge, but actually to abstain from, the ordinary requirements and refreshments of nature; nay, even the use of water was intermitted, an almost indispensable beverage in the hot and sultry climate of the East. There was an universal prostration of human greatness; no sounds of ill-timed mirth broke intrusive on the imposing scene; and the moaning of the animals, so invariable when deprived of their accustomed food; tended not a little to heighten the interesting but melancholy picture of a nation mourning for a nation's sins. In like manner, then, it is also our duty to use literal abstinence to such an extent as discretion may dictate, or conscience demand. Every thing that has a tendency to pamper the appetite, or inflame the pride of man, should be laid aside. The object of fasting being to mortify the body, and to assist in inducing a spirit of humiliation over the whole man, it is natural to suppose, that this end should be effected in a greater or less degree according as we more or less rigidly employ the means. The less the natural man is mortified, both as to frequency and degree, the less also are his natural propensities subdued.

But while we wish to give to *fasting* the consideration that is justly due to it, we would, at the same time, guard against the dangerous delusion of supposing that the great virtue of an *appointed fast*, consists in mere abstinence from food. That is certainly an enjoined part of the observance, and *only a part of it*; and is intended to be instrumental in promoting something of still greater importance. The Ninevites did not rest satisfied with merely abstaining from food—they did more: "They cried mightily unto God: with their fasting and mourning, they connected *prayer* and *supplication*.

This, then, forms a second feature of their conduct well worthy of our imitation.

And allow me to observe, that if there ever was a moment when Christendom needed, or had a right to expect the prayers of Christendom, the present is that moment. It matters little which way we turn our eyes, the ravages of disease, or, what perhaps are quite as much to be dreaded—intestine convulsions, meet our view. The constitution of all Europe (and how large a portion of it, at this period, can scarcely be said to have a constitution at all!) teems with eventful change. While, however, we justly look with friendly national solicitude to those *Foreign States*, to which we are politically allied, we turn with feelings of a higher and nobler cast—feelings of grateful and affectionate sympathy towards our native Country, under whose fostering care and maternal protection, we have attained to our present growth and strength. The prevalence of foreign example, and the influence of that worm which cankers the root of every earthly production, have unquestionably, in some degree, infected the spirit and disturbed the harmony of the British Nation. If, however, the long almost unclouded prosperity of Britain be *interrupted*, it is not *destroyed*. If a fell disease circulates in the veins of her population, and threatens to extend its effects to her Colonies, a nation's repentance may yet avert the bitter consequences of a nation's guilt; the prayers of a contrite people, like the incense of the Censor of Aaron, may appease the displeasure of God, and convert his threatening into smiles.

England has given us her salutary example: she has long since "besought the Lord," with supplication and mourning, to turn away from her His heavy hand. And as a part of that realm, whose interest is our own, we are now called upon publicly to emulate that example.—Provide then, by every means in your power, that your devotional acts, to which you are exhorted, be proportionate to the emergency which has rendered them necessary. As the Ninevites "cried mightily unto God," so should our prayers be characterized by a fix-

ednesss of thought, firmness of faith, and a fervour of pious and devout affections. While we pray for the peace, preservation, and prosperity of our beloved Country, and, for our brethren and companion's sakes, wish to do her good, it is the duty of every one to see that, so far as in him lies, he brings to his Country's offering a true and sincere heart. As part of a sinful nation, it is a duty properly incumbent upon us to 'lament our own and other's sins, and to cry mightily unto God as those who are in earnest, for His forgiveness and favour.' If we do not see the evil of sin, and the danger that must inevitably result from our continuing in the practice of it, and stir up ourselves to call upon God, notwithstanding our superior light and privileges, the example of the Ninevites will one day rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us. 'If we do not believe God when he threatens to destroy the impenitent,' we betray a spirit of stupidity or preverseness, from which even the heathen Ninevites were free.

But, my Brethren, we hope—we are persuaded, better things of you. Under the conviction that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth, that the Lord is King, be the people never so impatient,—that He sitteth between the Cherubim, be the earth never so unquiet—as Christians, we can approach the Most High in the day of adversity with the confidence that our afflictions come within the compass of His aid, and that He is as competent and ready now as he ever was, to deliver His people out of all their troubles.

The important situation which our Country holds in the scale of nations,—the almost unprecedented prosperity with which, under God, she has been favoured,—the many bright and burning lights she contains, who, as polished pillars, at once support and adorn the courts of the earthly Tabernacle of the Most High—lead us to indulge the hope that, though our sins have justly provoked the Divine displeasure, God will yet, at our repentance and prayer, turn again and be gracious unto His inheritance. We believe He has yet much work for our Country to do; and we trust the time is still distant when the land "shadowing with wings, that sendeth ambassadors by the sea,"* shall have the taper of Divine Truth removed out of her hand, with which she is at this moment enlightening the most distant regions of creation. While invoking the Divine Mercy seat in behalf of our Country, let the following beautiful reflection of the Psalmist dwell richly in your minds: "Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered; they trusted in thee, and were not confounded."

There is yet a THIRD, particular which the conduct of the

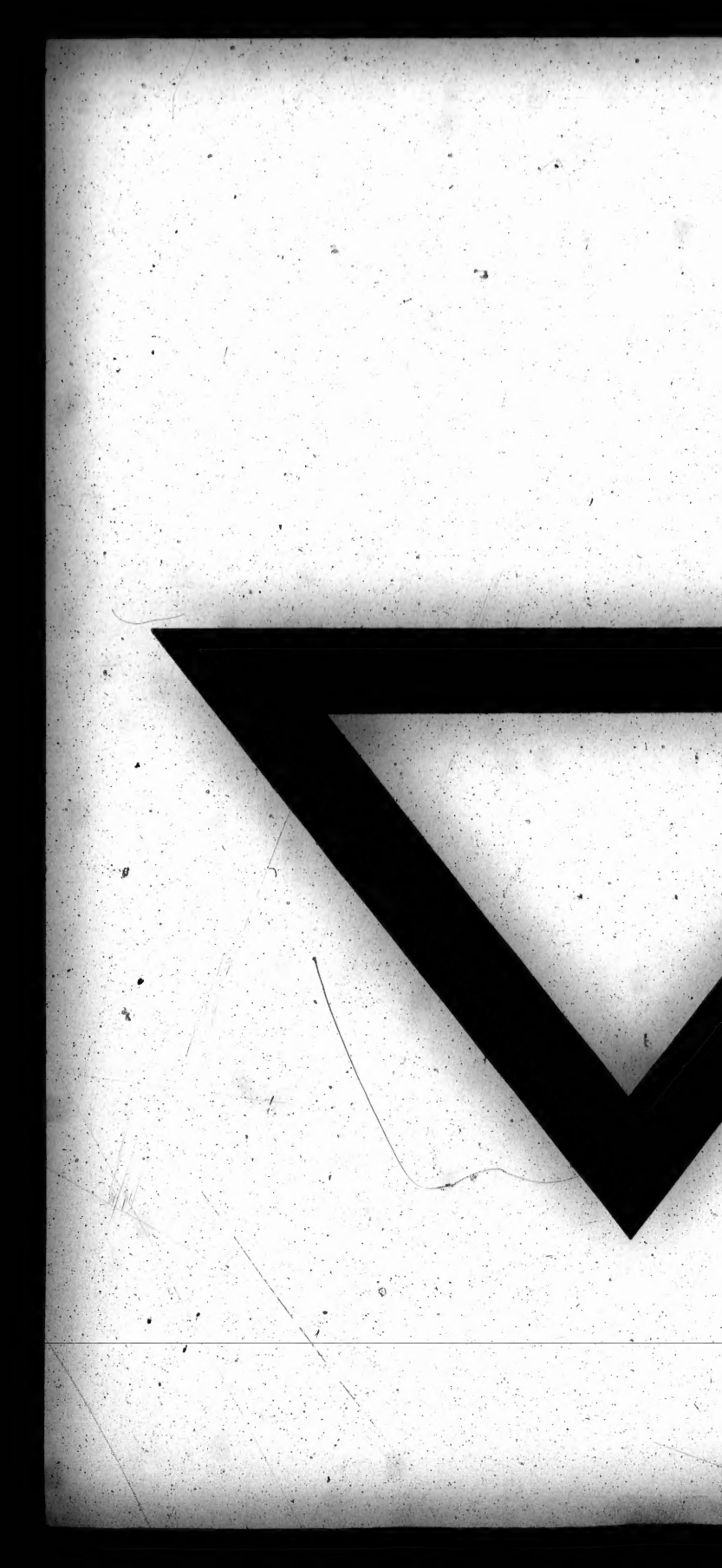
* Isaiah xviii. i. ii.

Ninevites very deservedly presses upon our attention. They not only fasted—they not only prayed—*but they turned them from all their evil courses*; a continuance in which would have prevented the reception of their prayers, by that Almighty Being to whom they were preferred. In like manner then, if we are desirous that our prayers should be acceptable to God, we also must reform what is incorrect in our lives. While we lift up our hands unto the Lord, let us see that those hands be holy, and that we "turn away from the violence that" naturally "is in them."

A time of national affliction is a season peculiarly fit for national reformation. Listen, then, to the appropriate exhortation of the text, and "turn every one of you from your evil ways." We all of us have some "evil way" which we have chosen above all other ways; some "evil way" in which we feel a more than common propensity to walk, and which may thence very properly be denominated the "evil way" of our heart. If, therefore, we would wish to render this peculiar season, and the religious exercises connected with it, profitable to ourselves, or beneficial to our Country, we must cease to indulge in those improper practices which tend to excite the displeasure of God against both. We must present unto God our offerings in righteousness. We must put away from us the evil of our doings, even those sins which adhere with most pertinacity to the heart: for if we regard iniquity in our own hearts, the Lord will not hear us.

Such, then, is the *nature* of that fast which the circumstances of our Country, and the Proclamation of the Government, require us to keep. And let us not think that we have done our duty fully, because, perhaps, we shall have used less nourishment on this day than we usually do; or be cause we have attended the public service of God, and have joined in the prayers of the Church for that protection, and those benefits which, as a people, we stand in need of. In doing these things, we have, so far, certainly done well; but let us not stop here. Abstinence and prayer lose all their efficacy if they be unsupported by holiness of life. How can we sincerely express by fasting our sorrow for sin, and by prayer truly implore the forgiveness of it, when neither in intention nor practice we have ceased to commit it? It is not enough that we fast on account of sin, we must turn from the commission of it also; and in order to the success of our prayers, must indulge in deliberate sin no more. This is the only fast God has chosen; and it is the only one he will condescend to regard.

May these particulars characterize generally the fast which Canada is this day called to observe! "Then," indeed, "will

the Lord be gracious unto his inheritance, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old." "Then shall our Country's light break forth as the morning, and its health shall spring forth speedily; its righteousness shall go before it; and the glory of the Lord shall be its reward." *

* Isaiah lviii. viii.